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Mattie Edwards Hewitt

A MODERN WRAP OF CLOTH OF GOLD AND FUR



INTERVIEW OF HENRY VIII OF ENGLAND AND FRANCIS I OF FRANCE ON THE FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD, BETWEEN ANDRES AND GUISNES, JUNE 1520

## Cloth of Gold and Cloth of Silver

BY ANDRÉ D'ASTARAC



WHAT a world of romance, an eternity of history the mention of Cloth of Gold suggests! Thought of it evokes memories of Kalidasa, of Shahrazad, of Irene, Theodora, Zoe, of Orbelerio's wife, of the Venetian Doges and Dogaressas, as the old masters depict them, sumptuously attired in fabrics adorned with threads of gold and threads of silver. The Piazza San Marco must, indeed, have been a dazzling light when they stepped forth in procession, accompanied by nobles and ladies almost as magnificently arrayed as themselves. The early Venetian artists were almost pagan, too, in their depicting Saints and Madonne clad in robes of gold and silver fabrics, for all the world looking as though the Venetian nobility of the day had, except for the hands and



A BYZANTINE EMPRESS OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY, SHOWING HER ROBED IN GOLDEN THREADED FABRIC. FROM A MANUSCRIPT IN THE BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE, PARIS

faces in the earlier works, posed for these figures in holiday apparel, supplied them by the manufacturers of cloth of gold who walked with the fraternity of the Arts in the great processions, gilt hoods on their heads, gold beads around their necks, only rivalled in costume by the barbers who followed crowned with wreaths and pearls. Even when some gloomy provident power in the state foresaw doom in luxury, and laws were enacted against lavish dress, the Doge, Dogaressa and their children were excepted and could wear *quicquid voluerint donec habitaverint palatio*.

If, says Molmenti, we study the paintings of ancient times and search ancient documents, we shall find that the women stand forth amid a thousand hues and sheen, and wonders of gold and silver; they appear in the midst of a gay phantasma-

goria of long silk dresses, of brocade, of tawny-colored muslin embroidered with gold, of velvet embroidered with silver. The delicate flesh tings are seen through the finest lace of Burano, and above the edge of the chemisette embroidered with gold, silver and silk threads, the jeweled stomachers define the figure, and from the shoulders hang hoods and capes lined with valuable fur. Of course, though Molmenti overlooks it, there were fabrics into which the threads of gold and of silver were woven, not merely embroidered. Such textiles were the real cloth of gold, the real cloth of silver, a



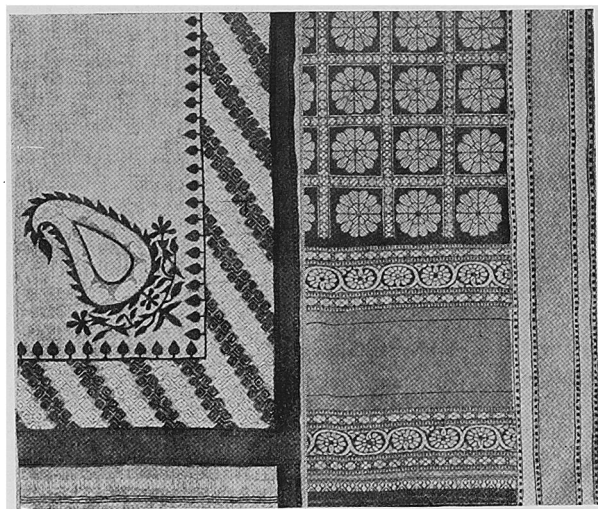
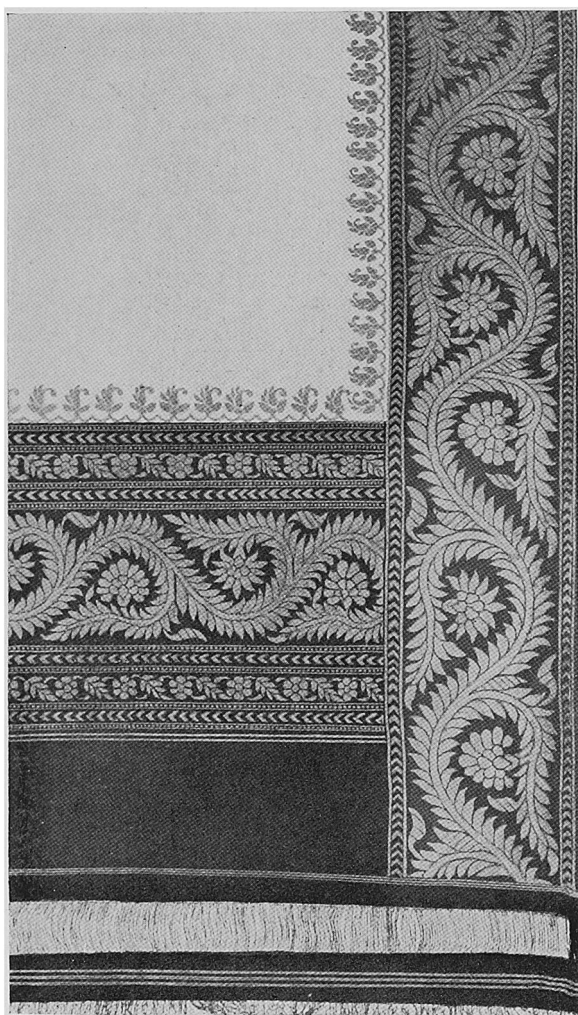
SECTION OF A LA  
COURONNE CLOTH  
OF GOLD FABRIC  
OF THE TIME OF  
FRANCIS I.

fabric known to the Orient as well, as the marvellous fabrics of India disclose, delicate gossamer—like silk warps weighted with webs of metallic threads.

The pomp of the Venetians and the tales of the East told by Marco Polo and his followers must have bestirred Francis I to emulation when he arranged the *Champ du Drap d'Or* between Andres and Guisnes in France for his meeting with Henry VIII of England, just four hundred summers ago. Field of the Cloth of Gold indeed! The splendor of it has immortalized the occasion in this unforgettable name, a name which conjures up for us the culture of King Francis' court.

Down through the ages we have held in high esteem the precious fabrics that are part of our dreams of Byzantium, of Cyprus. Even the drab fashions that occasionally have darkened the world never made us forget these things which helped to put sparkle into life between the Thirteenth and the Seventeenth century.

We look back at the year 1492 when Charles VIII of France proclaimed protection for the cloth of gold and the cloth of silver which the silk merchants of Lyons long before had petitioned to have brought about, thus saving to France the



PATTERNED ENDS OF CLOTH OF GOLD AND CLOTH OF SILVER FABRICS FROM BENARES AND FROM NUGGAR, KATTYWAR, INDIA





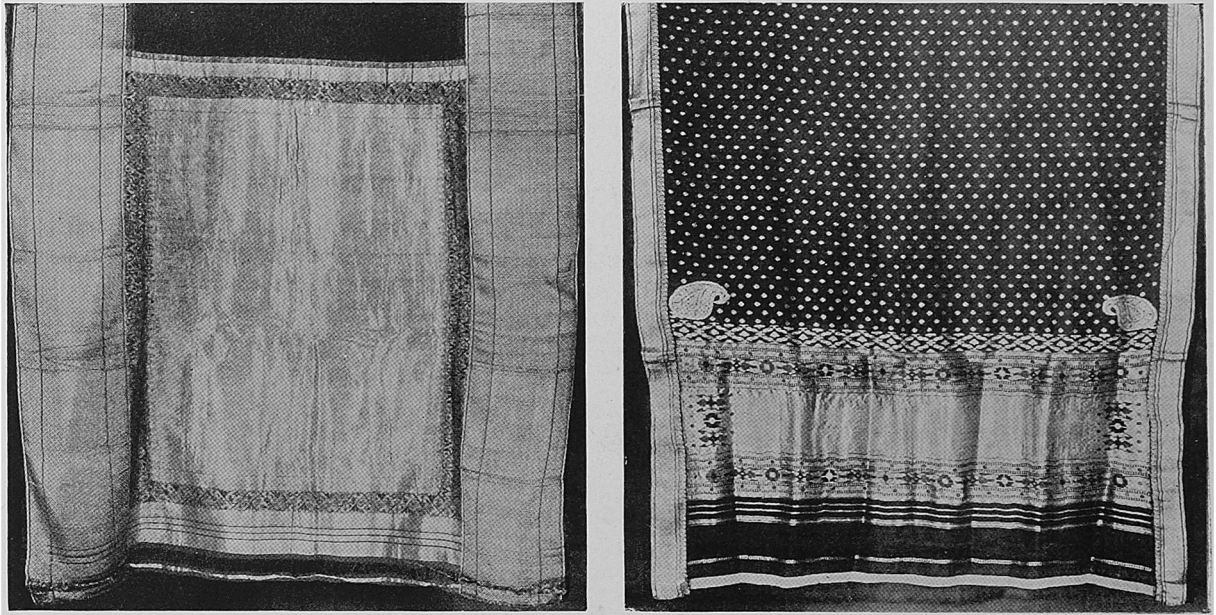
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A MODERN EVENING GOWN OF CLOTH OF SILVER



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A MODERN EVENING GOWN WITH TRAIN OF CLOTH OF SILVER



Courtesy of Rahamin Sahib, Bombay, India

**GREEN SAREE WITH RICH GOLD BORDER AND END, OF THE TYPE CALLED SHALU, AND A PURPLE DECCAN SAREE**

This beautiful old Saree belonged to one of the Peishwa Queens (Ranees) of Deccan, and is remarkable for the fine muslin which is woven along with the gold edges on its three sides. It is ten yards long and particularly wide and when worn, trails in beautiful folds behind the royal wearer. The end that passes over the shoulders or the head, has been embellished in colors with what is called "Mina" work (*i. e.*, enamel), and is jewel-like in its exquisite beauty. The ladies of the Deccan prized this sort of Saree greatly, as the lovely hand-woven delicate muslin, weighted with its golden edges, was most admirably suited for their particular style of drapery. The soft green color is obtained from vegetable dyes, and the Saree can be washed without losing any of its beauty. Rarely one comes across such a perfect specimen, as these cloths are no longer woven. The second piece, an old purple Saree, is of a commoner sort and is woven of silk, with little golden design all over and finished with an edging and end of gold, part of the border that is tucked in, is in silk. The narrower width shows that it was not meant to be worn by Royalty, nor is the silken material so highly prized as the fine muslin. It is about eight yards in length and also washable, is a good specimen of its kind.

500,000 écus annually spent on the importation of these materials. Under the Louis, cloth of gold and cloth of silver had abundant encouragement, and many of the French fabrics vied with that of the magnificent gown of cloth of gold sent by the Grand Turk to Marguerite of Valois from Constantinople, a gown worn by the French Queen on Easter Day in 1571.

Again have gorgeous metal fabrics come into fashion. Many of them are modifications of the woven gold and silver webs, of the golden brocades and of the gold and silver embroidered stuffs. But all of them have added a more scintillant note to modern festal attire, a note saved from barbaric dissonance by harmonious modern composition.



MEETING OF FRANCIS I AND HENRY VIII ON THE FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD. FROM A BAS-RELIEF ON THE HÔTEL DU BOURG THEROUDE, ROUEN